

June 8th, 2001

The Leader Who Serves (Indianapolis, IN)

C. William Pollard

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/pollard_papers

 Part of the [Business Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), and the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pollard, C. William, "The Leader Who Serves (Indianapolis, IN)" (2001). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 190.
https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/pollard_papers/190

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Work and Faith at Digital Commons @ SPU. It has been accepted for inclusion in C. William Pollard Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ SPU.

The Greenleaf Center
Indianapolis IN

June 8, 2001

"The Leader Who Serves"

C. William Pollard
The ServiceMaster Company

It is a special privilege for me to participate with you in this conference on servant leadership. Over the years, I have admired and respected what the Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership has accomplished in the lives of people and in the lives of organizations. While I have sought to serve as I have led and taught on this subject, I still feel that I am more of a student than a teacher.

To serve as one leads does not come naturally one does stand organizational behavior encourages it.
The process and discipline of serving as one leads is not always natural or smooth. The perks, hierarchy and perception of title and position that exist in *and the person* normal organizational behavior often get in the way. The leader who feels he or *isolation of a leader to succeed*

she has arrived in understanding or implementing the role of a servant more likely than not has failed to understand the scope and depth of the subject.

Your conferences, research and writings on this subject have played an important role in the understanding and practice of servant leadership. I hope my comments and examples today will be a helpful addition.

people
The context and reference point for my ~~examples~~ *comment* on the subject come from *experience* my ~~life~~ in ServiceMaster where for the last 24 years I have participated in the leadership and growth of our company. Our revenues ~~today~~ *now* are almost \$8 billion, we serve over 12 million customers in the US and 44 foreign countries, and manage and employ over 250,000 people.

We have experienced a lot of change over this period of time, e.g., 85% of the services we are delivering today we were not doing just ten years ago *and as part of this* *regardless of the market and* *we can't* *not* *change* *in the* *all of our lives* *change* *our purposes of life* *but our* company objectives *our purposes of life* have not changed. They are: To honor God in all we do – To help people develop – To pursue excellence – To grow profitably.

The first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals. They have become our mission and organizing principle for our business.

As we seek to implement these objectives in the operation of our business, they provide for us a reference point for seeking to do that which is right and avoiding that which is wrong. They remind us that every person, regardless of title, position, faith, choice or label, has been created in the image of God with dignity, worth and great potential. They have become the basis for our single-minded focus on people as individuals, not just what they do and how they do it, not just with economic and physical needs but also with intellectual and spiritual needs.

We do not use our first objective as a basis of exclusion. It is, in fact, the reason for our promotion of diversity as we recognize that different people are all part of God's mix. And it does not mean that everything will be done right. We experience our share of mistakes, but because of a stated standard and reason for that standard, we cannot hide our mistakes. They are flushed out in the open for correction and, in some cases, forgiveness.

These objectives cause us to think and rethink about who we are – why we work – not just what we do and how we do it - and what is the purpose and meaning of it all?

It was Socrates who stated that a person should first understand oneself as a means of making a contribution to others. Know thyself was his advice. Aristotle counseled his followers ^{just} to use one's talents to the utmost. One must have discernment, discretion and direction. His advice was control thyself. Another great thinker suggested service to others. "Give thyself" were words spoken by Jesus as He washed His disciples feet. In so doing, He taught that no leader is greater than the people he or she leads and even the humblest of tasks is worthy for a leader to do.

Does this example fit into today's world 2000 years later? There is certainly no scarcity of feet to wash and towels are always available. The only limitation, if there is one, is with the leader. Are we willing, figuratively or actually, to be on our hands and knees, to compromise our pride and status, to be involved and to have compassion for those we lead and those we work with?

*walk
kneel from*
Now, as a business firm, we want to excel at generating profits, *But I am also a person*
creating value for our shareholders. If we don't want to play by these rules, we don't belong in the ballgame. But we also believe that the business firm can be a community to help shape human character and moral behavior and *in the process to* be involved in developing people as *And caring for the firm* **the soul of the firm**. The measure of success of a leader in our firm cannot be limited to the value of our shares or the profit we produce. More importantly, it must relate to the people we work with and seek to serve. It is from this framework and context that I would now like to share some principles and examples of servant leadership with you. *next*

First, a servant leader should be prepared to walk in the shoes of those we lead. In ServiceMaster this means that, as part of leadership training, we experience what it is like to do the hands-on service work and to feel the emotions of those we're going to lead and manage. *How often does this make you*

So when I started with ServiceMaster over 20 years ago as Senior Vice President responsible for the legal and financial affairs of the company, the first three months of my training were involved in doing cleaning and maintenance tasks in hospitals, industrial facilities and homes. For me, it was a learning and serving experience and helped me to identify with the needs and concerns of our service workers. It was a great lesson in servant leadership. It has been a reminder for me that I must always be prepared to serve and should never ask anyone to do something I'm not willing to do myself. (explain We Serve Day)

Second, we should believe in the people we lead and always be ready to be surprised by their potential and to be ready to accept their difference. A colleague of mine tells of an experience that has been a great reminder to me of this point. It is often the custom of firms to hand out service pins in recognition of years of service. As my friend was involved in such an event, he was surprised by the response of one of the recipients. The young man opened the box, took out the beautiful sterling silver tie tack and said thanks, and with a wide grin proudly put the service pin in his earlobe not on his lapel.

People are different, and we should never be too quick to judge potential by appearance or lifestyle. The firm at work is a place where diversity should be promoted. It is the servant leader's responsibility to set the tone, to learn to accept the differences of people and to seek to provide an environment where different

people contribute as part of the whole and so to strengthen the group and achieve unity in diversity.

Third, we should make ourselves available. Our door should always be open. We should be out and about, talking and listening to people at all levels of the organization. We should always be willing to do whatever we ask of others. At our headquarters building in Downers Grove, we have designed our executive offices as a reminder of this principle of listening, learning and serving. Nobody works behind closed doors. Glass is everywhere, confirming our desire to have an open office and open mind. No executive office captures an outside window. The view to the outside is available to all working in the office.

Fourth, we must be committed, not a bystander or simply a holder of position. No enterprise can function to its capacity nor can its people expect a healthy organizational culture unless they can rely upon the covenants and commitments of their leaders. This goes beyond the covenants usually contained in a legal document. It extends to the people who day-by-day are relying upon the leader for their future. It is fulfilling a leader's campaign promises. It is the leader's obligation or, as some have described it, "their posture of indebtedness".

One of the best ways I have found to communicate the extent of this obligation is to picture it as a debt, a liability if you will, on the balance sheet of a leader. (Here tell story of leadership and stock ownership.)

Fifth, we must develop and nurture an environment where people are the subject of work and not just the object of work. (here tell the story of Olga and Nisha)

What was the difference between these two people? Yes, one was born in Moscow, the other New Dehli, and their race and language and nationalities were different, but their basic tasks were the same. They both had to work for a living. They both had modest and limited financial resources. One was very proud of what she was doing. Her work had affected her view of herself and others. The other was not, and she had a limited view of her potential and worth.

The difference, I suggest, has something to do with how they were treated, loved and cared for in their work environment. In one case, the mission of the organization involved the development of the person. In the other case the objective was to provide activity and call it work.

So will the real leader please stand up? Not the president or the person with the most distinguished title or the longest tenure, but the role model. Not the

highest paid person in the group, but the risk taker. Not the person with the largest car or the biggest home, but the servant. Not the person who promotes himself or herself, but the promoter of others. Not the administrator, but the initiator. Not the taker, but the giver. Not the talker, but the listener.

Leadership is both an art and a science. The results of servant leadership will be measured beyond the work place. The story will be told in the changed lives of people. In developing the social contract for the 21st century, the business firm must increasingly become a community - a community that seeks to develop human character and moral behavior. Leadership - servant leadership – can make the difference.

As I close, listen to this story told by James Smith. He knows what it means to serve. He knows what it means to lead.

Your notes on the original speech added the above paragraph. Perhaps you then did not use the following. Otherwise, I would change the wording so that we do not say “As I close” two times.

Listen as I close with these words from T. S. Eliot:

“What life have you if you not have life together?”

There is no life that is not in community.
And no community not lived in praise of God.
And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads.
And no man knows or cares who is his neighbor,
Unless his neighbor makes too much disturbance.
And the wind shall say, here were decent Godless people.
Their only monument the asphalt road,
And a thousand lost golf balls.
Can you keep the city that the Lord keeps not with you?
A thousand policemen directing the traffic,
And not tell you why you come, or where you go.
When the stranger says: "What is the meaning of this city?"
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?
What will you answer? We all dwell together,
To make money from each other? Is this a community?
And the stranger will depart and return to the desert.
Oh my soul be prepared for the coming of the stranger.
Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions."

Rev. 9/4/01